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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 000651

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DEPT FOR NEA/ARP (WALKER, SHUKAN, JACHIM), INL, DRL, PRM

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S FAREWELL CALL ON RIYADH PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR PRINCE SALMAN

Classified By: Ambassador James C. Oberwetter for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (C) Ambassador made a farewell call on Riyadh Provincial Governor HRH Prince Salman bin Abdul Aziz on March 25. The Prince emphasized personal ties to the U.S., as well as the strong bilateral relationship in the context of the SAG's reform agenda and efforts to resolve the Palestinian conflict. The Prince emphasized the importance for the U.S. to leave Iraq with dignity, worried about Iranian influence in the region, and discussed the causes and effect of terrorism. He also asked for improvements in the U.S. visa system. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Ambassador made a farewell call on Riyadh Provincial Governor HRH Prince Salman bin Abdul Aziz on March 25. Prince Salman was accompanied by his private secretary, Ra'fat al-Sabbagh, who interpreted during the meeting. The Prince emphasized the importance of his personal ties with Ambassador, discussing the important role that former U.S. ambassadors to the KSA play in explaining Saudi Arabia to Americans. He said it is important that these ambassadors maintain their ties with the Kingdom, adding that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia have many common interests.

¶3. (C) Prince Salman said the U.S. and the KSA have had and continue to have three common strategies for the Middle East: saving Afghanistan from Communism, protecting Pakistan, and denying Russia access to the Arabian Gulf. He emphasized that Pakistan is an important friend of the KSA. He noted that even though Russia was the first country to recognize the KSA and that it never tried to export Communism or revolution to the KSA, the U.S. and the KSA have agreed on the importance of keeping Communism out of the Middle East and stopping Russia from realizing its dream of warm water port(s) on the Arabian Gulf.

¶4. (C) Prince Salman said the pace and extent of reforms depend on social and cultural factors. He claimed that for social reasons -- not religious reasons -- reforms cannot be imposed by the SAG or there will be negative reactions. Instead, he said, changes have to be introduced in a sensitive and timely manner. He pointed out that the U.S. did not address racism against blacks and religious discrimination against Jews until the mid-1960s because of social and political circumstances, saying these constraints also apply to Saudi Arabia. He emphasized that the rights of women are better under Islam, but that social and cultural circumstances prevented women from being educated until

relatively recently. He claimed that Islam had democracy before other cultures because the Qur'an states that rulers must consult others before making decisions. He stressed that this consultation process is democracy in action. He pointed out that democracy should not be imposed, citing the U.S. Civil War as a relevant analogy. He said that the KSA is composed of tribes and regions and if democracy were imposed, each tribe and region would have its political party.

¶ 15. (C) Prince Salman said that he hopes for an end to the Palestinian conflict and that the March 24 meeting in Aswan would succeed. He said also that he hopes the U.S. and Israel understand the necessity of resolving this problem, stressing that Israel has a chance to do so. He added that it is in the interest of the U.S. and Israel to solve this problem in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolutions, emphasizing that King Abdullah's peace proposal contains "all guarantees." He said that if the U.S. wants stability in the region, it must solve the Palestinian conflict. Ostensibly alluding to Israel, he said it is impossible to want everything but give nothing. He noted that the U.S. supports Israel, but argued that the Europeans are increasingly distancing themselves from it. He said that Israel is a burden on the U.S., but that the KSA is not a burden on anyone.

¶ 16. (C) Stressing that the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is the core problem in the Middle East, the Prince said that but for this conflict, the region would have better ties with the West. He pointed out that since 1948, various countries -- namely Syria, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, and Egypt -- have used the pretext of liberating the Palestinian territories as justification for military coups, military interventions, imposition of socialism and other economic policies,

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promotion of Arab nationalism, and restriction of civil society and civil liberties, including freedom of speech and elections. He noted that Egypt's Nasser imported weapons from the Eastern Bloc and intervened in Yemen using the pretext of liberating the Palestinian territories. He pointed out that Saddam Hussein used the pretext of liberating the Palestinian territories to invade Kuwait. He said that today, Iran is using the pretext of liberating the Palestinian territories to build nuclear weapons. He said that Hezbollah's Nasrallah uses the pretext of liberating the Palestinian territories for his actions, but stated that he lies. He said that if there had been no Palestinian conflict, the Middle East would be more economically, culturally, and politically advanced today. He pointed out that military regimes had undermined the strong economies of Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Sudan.

¶ 17. (C) Prince Salman said that he hopes for an end to the Iraqi crisis. He emphasized that the U.S. should not leave Iraq defeated, but with pride. He said he thinks it is good for the U.S. Congress to say that U.S. troops should be withdrawn from Iraq by 2008, so long as the U.S. maintains its dignity. He also noted that it is the U.S. Congress' duty to authorize funding for Iraq, pointing out that Iraq is unlike other states in that it is multiethnic and multisectarian. He stressed that historically, Iraq has been ruled with force.

¶ 18. (C) Prince Salman said the KSA had excellent relations with Iran when the Shah was in power. He also pointed out that Iran was more developed and had a stronger economy before the 1979 revolution. He claimed that the KSA has never had problems with its neighbors, even Iran, like the problems the U.S. has had with its Latin American neighbors. However, he pointed out that since the 1979 revolution, Iran has created new problems and divisions by trying to export its ideology. He claimed that the KSA does not have problems with other creeds or sects.

¶ 19. (C) Prince Salman said that terrorism and fanaticism have

done more harm to Islam than anything else. He claimed that the KSA suffered from terrorism before 9/11. He emphasized that there are fanatics in all religions. He said that extremism feeds extremism and that Jewish and Christian extremism has fed Islamic extremism. He stressed that the Qur'an recognizes all prophets and religions and that a Muslim must believe in Jesus and Moses or he cannot be a complete Muslim. (COMMENT: Prince Salman implied that Christians and Jews do not show the same respect for the Prophet Mohammad and Islam. END COMMENT).

¶ 10. (C) Prince Salman asked if the U.S. Embassy could institute special procedures for "well-known" individuals who need visas to travel to the U.S., saying that his wife had difficulty getting a visa to see her doctor in the U.S., so the doctor had traveled to Spain to see her. He also said that his son, Prince Mohammed, refused to go to the U.S. Embassy to be fingerprinted "like some criminal," even though his other son, Prince Faisal, and his daughter, Hessa, voiced no objections to doing so. He warned that Saudis are traveling to countries other than the U.S., notably Germany, for medical treatment because of problems and delays in obtaining U.S. visas.

GFOELLER